

VZCZCXRO2419
PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHNT #2006/01 3251038
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 211038Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8802
INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3468
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9678
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4084
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 3947
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3734
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1983
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0007
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1660
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0848
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2147
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 002006

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/21/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [EAID](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE WITH UZBEKISTAN INTENSIFYING

REF: A. TASHKENT 1999

[1](#)B. TASHKENT 2000

Classified By: Poloff Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In response to the Ambassador's request for a meeting with President Karimov, First Deputy Foreign Minister Nematov summoned the Ambassador on November 20 to discuss the reasons for such a high-level meeting. The Ambassador emphasized the prospect of an upcoming sanctions vote in Congress and that Karimov could help the GOU's case by demonstrating personal engagement and spurring GOU action on specific, concrete human rights concerns. The Ambassador described his upcoming trip to Washington, including planned personal meetings on the Hill to discuss the sanctions. Nematov appeared genuinely shocked and angry that the U.S. is considering sanctions based on Andijon, and stated multiple times that it was "absolutely incomprehensible", particularly given recent EU steps to soften its stance. Nematov conceded that "we fully and openly acknowledge the Andijon events were a national tragedy" in which "many peaceful people died", and he added the President said so as well. Nematov emphasized that the root of the Andijon tragedy was "a terrorist act committed by armed bandits", and he also said tough policies are necessary given the widespread instability in the region.

The Ambassador noted that Uzbekistan has at the very least an image problem that persists in Washington, and that more sources of independent verification of the human rights situation would be helpful. The Ambassador raised recent allegations of torture contributing to the deaths of two prison inmates, which Nematov vehemently denied. Nematov proposed an early meeting to discuss ICRC prison visit access. Separately, the Ambassador met on November 21 with Foreign Minister Norov and was informed that the requested meeting with Karimov would occur on November 22. We hope -- and believe -- that the threat of sanctions may have jolted the GOU into an awareness of the precarious state of our rapprochement. End summary.

MFA Screens Request for Meeting with Karimov

[1](#)2. (C) First Deputy Foreign Minister Nematov summoned the

Ambassador on November 20 to explore the reasons for a requested audience with President Karimov. He seemed concerned that such a request had even been made, and listened carefully as the Ambassador explained that Congress is sour on Uzbekistan and that two different sanctions bills were gathering momentum in the House and the Senate (the latter being of particular concern). The Ambassador noted that the Department is concerned about the sanctions and that he planned to personally visit the Hill next week to discuss the proposals during a regional COM conference in Washington. The Ambassador stressed that a personal meeting with Karimov would carry some weight and enable the Department to point to recent personal engagement and concrete steps.

"Absolutely incomprehensible"

13. (C) Nematov seemed genuinely shocked by the prospects of a new round of sanctions rooted in the Andijon events and stated numerous times during the meeting that it is not comprehensible. He demanded to know "what concrete accusations are they making?" He said this was particularly surprising since the EU has recently lifted sanctions and is softening its stance on Uzbekistan, so it is "simply not understandable" that the U.S. would be doing the opposite. He added that "Uzbekistan does all that is possible to continue a dialogue" and recounted how "European experts" on two occasions reviewed the Andijon events, including film and documentary evidence, and concluded that the underlying cause of the incidents was a "terrorist act committed by armed bandits." He also said the GOU itself promptly implemented "concrete measures" to ensure it does not happen again. He

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said the GOU considers the matter closed, and was incredulous that "these senators want to make an enemy of Uzbekistan" based on what he said were faulty, unreliable sources used by Human Rights Watch.

Andijon "a National Tragedy"

14. (C) Comment: While Nematov was upset by the prospect of sanctions, it is significant that he stated "we fully and openly acknowledge that the Andijon events were a national tragedy." He added that, although it was a terrorist act, that "many peaceful people died." His response seemed emotional and unscripted, but he claimed that President Karimov himself has made similar acknowledgements about Andijon. We will note, however, that European observers say the EU experts were "stonewalled" by the Uzbeks and still do not have a full accounting of what happened. End comment.

A Tough Neighborhood

15. (C) Nematov also frankly conceded that Uzbekistan's domestic policies are tough, but he feels his country successfully balances stability, religious freedom, and a gradual democratic process. He cited Uzbekistan's regional situation and, while European countries have the luxury of peaceful, stable neighbors, Uzbekistan must be concerned about Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, Chinese Turkestan, and proximity to Iran. South and Central Asia, he continued, is afflicted by terror groups, instability, and seemingly "99 percent of the world's narcotics passing by" en route from Afghanistan. On Pakistan, he said the GOU is concerned that Musharraf "is in a tough position" and specifically mentioned Waziristan. He added that "Karzai cannot control the internal situation" in Afghanistan.

Strategic Realities

16. (C) The Ambassador told Nematov that such regional

instability is also a reason why the U.S. seeks strategic cooperation with Uzbekistan. Nodding agreement, Nematov thanked the Ambassador for his "openness" and was interested that the SCA Ambassadors are gathering in Washington to conduct meetings on the region.

Paucity of NGOs Contributes to Image Problem

¶7. (C) The Ambassador noted that Uzbekistan at the very least has an image problem which persists in Washington, and that this made it easier for influential human rights groups to persuade powerful members of Congress to introduce sanctions bills. He said that it is difficult for either the USG or the GOU to offer convincing alternate viewpoints since there are so few NGOs in the country which could provide independent verification. The Ambassador cited a November 7 report issued by Human Rights Watch alleging torture in Uzbekistan, and said that while torture can occur in any system the important thing is to have a mechanism to identify and address it.

Nematov Refutes Prisoner Torture Allegations

¶8. (C) The Ambassador raised the issue of two recent inmate deaths that were alleged to have been caused by torture (reftel A). Nematov was aware of the allegations and vehemently denied them. He strongly asserted that the inmates died of natural causes and referenced MFA documents that claim the inmates both had illnesses. One allegedly suffered from heart and stomach ailments and the other from a myriad of ailments including tuberculosis, hepatitis, and

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bronchitis. He claimed both were taken by ambulance to a civilian hospital, where they received the same treatment any citizen would get. He said any deaths are a shame, especially for grieving loved ones, but he said these inmates "had violated laws", and "every nation has its criminals".

¶9. (C) In response to Nematov's comments, the Ambassador underscored that the GOU's assertions would be more credible in the international community if there was an ICRC-style prison visit regime in place to provide independent verification. Nematov suggested an early meeting with MFA, MVD, the ICRC, and the Ambassador to discuss the next steps in facilitating renewed ICRC prison visits.

Comment

¶10. (C) Nematov's genuine shock about the sanctions gathering momentum in Congress indicates the Uzbek Embassy may not have kept MFA well-informed about key policy developments. The Uzbeks are very sensitive (Nematov specifically noted that the GOU appreciated that President Bush did not mention Uzbekistan at the UNGA, but he was puzzled and upset by alleged U.S. statements in Geneva critical of Uzbekistan) and the renewed threat of visa sanctions over Andijon has already elicited a strong reaction. In this respect, the threat of additional sanctions has proved useful. However, if sanctions are ultimately adopted, the slowly reemerging bilateral relationship may backslide, even as Uzbek relations with Europe improve. This would be extremely unhelpful to U.S. strategic interests in the region. We hope the planned November 22 meeting with President Karimov will help spur the GOU to take some immediate steps to address Congressional concerns.

NORLAND